

Reexamining the “Gas Chamber” of Dachau

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Of the Dachau crematorium called “Barrack X,” one can read the following on the Web site of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum: “There is no credible evidence that the gas chamber in Barrack X was used to murder human beings.”^[1] A strange situation indeed, given that the facility, built in late 1942 and completed by May 1943,^[2] allegedly contained a dedicated homicidal gas chamber of substantial size—about 39 square meters (425 square feet), sufficient to gas nearly 400 people at a time, on the traditional view. Why would the Germans build such a dedicated facility, and then never use it?—not a single mass gassing, in nearly two years?^[3] Is there perhaps another story here? And what can we learn from examining the facility today?

The following study is the result of my personal visit to Dachau over a period of three days in mid-2011. All photos included below are my own. Photo 1 shows the exterior of the crematorium building, with the external wall of the gas chamber on the left (behind the water downspout). Photo 2 is the current floor plan.



Photo 1: Crematorium exterior (gas chamber area at left).



Photo 2: Crematorium floor plan (room 5 = gas chamber).

In the immediate aftermath of the war, no doubt was expressed or entertained that the crematorium contained a homicidal chamber. An official US Army report, issued within days of takeover of the camp, was unequivocal. In Dachau the Germans conducted a “systematic policy of extermination” (Perry 2000: 14-15)—though today we know that no such thing ever occurred or was even planned. There were “a total of five gas chambers” (p. 44), the largest disguised as a shower. In it, 15 fake shower heads were installed, “from which gas was then released” (p. 52).

The Nuremberg Tribunal proceedings contain two important references, the first in the so-called Chavez Report, dated 7 May 1945:

"The new [crematorium] building had a gas chamber for executions... The gas chamber was labeled 'shower room' over the entrance and was a large room with airtight doors and double-glassed lights, sealed and gas proof. The ceiling was studded with dummy shower heads. A small observation peephole, double-glassed and hermetically sealed, was used to observe the conditions of the victims. There were grates in the floor. Hydrogen cyanide was mixed in the room below, and rose into the gas chamber and out the top vents."

Now, the showerheads no longer supply the deadly gas, but it emanates from the floor. There is indeed a cellar room below the gas chamber, but we have no evidence at all that it was a ‘Zyklon mixing room,’ or that such gas entered the room from below. Today there are six floor vents in the room, and by all accounts they are, and have always been, actual water drains (photo 3). This is logical, because the room was likely built from the start as an ordinary inmate shower facility.



Photo 3: Gas chamber floor.



Photo 4: "Fake shower heads."



Photo 5: Sole remaining intact head.



Photo 6: Missing funnel.



Photo 7: Rework to ceiling around shower head.



Photo 8: Entrance to gas chamber.



Photo 9: Exit door obstruction.



Photo 10: Exit door obstruction.



Photo 11: Two Zyklon ports.



Photo 12: Zyklon port and grill.



Photo 13: Two Zyklon chutes.



Photo 14: Delousing chamber.



Photo 15: Hot-air fumigation device.



Photo 16: Left Zyklon chute.



Photo 17: Right Zyklon chute.



Photo 18: Mortar variation in right chute.



Das Gebäude ist aus dem Jahre 1944. Es ist ein Teil der Lagerhalle für Zyklon B.
Die Lagerhalle ist im Jahre 1944, als die Lagerhalle für die Lagerung von Zyklon B.
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Photo 19: Crematorium in summer 1944.

American newspapers were quick to report the gruesome news. A visit by some prominent journalists on May 2, arranged by General Eisenhower, was reported in the *New York Times*:

"One of the worst death traps seen by the party was a gas chamber at Dachau disguised as a bathhouse. Mr. [Gideon] Seymour described it as a room about 30 by 20 feet square, with 25 rows of perforated pipes overhead. There were no water connections to the showers, but instead the pipes were supplied from the same gas pipes that led to the cremation chambers. ... In the chamber walls, Mr. Seymour said, were small glass 'peepholes' through which the German guards could observe the dying agonies of the condemned." (9 May 1945, p. 17)

Here we see an immediate contradiction with the first two reports: no gas from showerheads, no gassing through floor vents, but rather rows of overhead perforated pipes. Also, the alleged connection with the ductwork of the cremation chamber (room #8 in Photo 2) is absurd; there is no conceivable reason to run Zyklon gas, which is flammable, into a furnace room. And the reported floor area of roughly 600 square feet—versus today's figure of 425—is a significant overestimate.

Further confusion would come soon after the Chavez report, when, in an American investigation report of May 15, it was stated that "The supply of gas into the chamber was controlled by means of two valves on one of the outer walls... The gas was let into the chamber through pipes terminating in perforated brass fixtures set into the ceiling." [4] No gas from the floor, no rows of perforated pipes, but now "perforated brass fixtures." Today, incidentally, there is no evidence whatsoever of brass fixtures. Significantly, the May 15 report also stated that "the ceiling was some 10 feet in height." Today it is about 2.15 meters, or 6 feet 10 inches. This is a huge discrepancy, and not attributable to misjudgment; clearly the ceiling was lowered, *after* takeover by the Americans.

The second Nuremberg reference came in testimony by Dr. Franz Blaha, a Czech prisoner and four-year inmate. He stated:

"Many executions by gas or shootings or injections took place right in the camp. The gas chamber was completed in 1944, and I was called by Dr. Rascher to examine the first victims. Of the eight or nine persons in the chamber there were three still alive... Many prisoners were later killed in this way."

A puzzle: Blaha claims the chamber was completed only in 1944, but experts today insist that it was part of the original construction that began in 1942. The *NYT* reported on Blaha's testimony in November 1945, dramatically stating that he was "assigned to work in the death chamber of the hospital"—meaning, of course, the mortuary. Blaha told of decapitations and the creation of shrunken heads, and of skin made into "gloves, lampshades, riding breeches, house-slippers, handbags" and other items (all such claims have since been completely discredited, putting Blaha's credibility into serious doubt). He also recalled "the wholesale execution of Russian prisoners in a gas chamber... He declared that a quick death in the gas chamber had been meted out to the sick prisoners transferred to Dachau from other camps" (Nov. 17, p. 7).

Meanwhile the *NYT* continued to report on the alleged gassing atrocities. For example, it reported statements by one Colonel Jaworski that "Jews had been 'ruthlessly wiped out' by hanging and firing squad and gas chambers at Dachau. Frequently they were paraded into a gas chamber, told to strip for

shower and then left to die when the gas was turned on” (21 October, p. 11)—as if the gas chamber were like some household oven.

As one can imagine, questions eventually arose regarding the veracity of these gas chamber reports.^[5] The first challenges appeared in 1950, with Paul Rassinier’s book *Le mensonge d’Ulysse*, and Maurice Bardèche’s *Nuremberg*, both in French. In 1954, the German Ludwig Paulin published an article, “The lie of the 238,000: What happened in camp Dachau?,” in which he disputed the existence of a gas chamber.^[6] Two months later, another article appeared in the same journal, pseudonymously written by American military attorney Stephen Pinter. Pinter claimed to have visited all the western camps, including Dachau, without finding any credible evidence for homicidal gas chambers.^[7]

In 1958, Louis Marschalko published the book *The World Conquerors*. He argues that, upon takeover by the Americans, captive Germans “were ordered subsequently to build various additional buildings with the greatest possible speed” (p. 155). They constructed “blood-pits” and a “hanging tree,” and destroyed gardens and flowerbeds that might detract from the ‘death camp’ image. Marschalko adds, “The shower-baths, dressing rooms, and reception halls had to be rebuilt so that they should appear like gas-chambers” (p. 156).

In June of 1959, Pinter spoke out again, publishing the follow statement in a letter to a Catholic periodical:

“I was in Dachau for 17 months after the war, as a U.S. War Department Attorney, and can state that there was no gas chamber at Dachau. What was shown to visitors and sightseers there and erroneously described as a gas chamber was a crematory. Nor was there a gas chamber in any of the other concentration camps in Germany.” (Our Sunday Visitor, June 14, p. 15)

Former inmate and Catholic bishop Johannes Neuhäusler claimed, in 1960, that no gas chamber had ever been put into use at the camp.^[8] Two months later, orthodox German historian Martin Broszat issued a letter confirming that “Neither in Dachau nor in Bergen-Belsen nor in Buchenwald were Jews or other prisoners gassed.”^[9]

Admission of no gassing at the camp was an important milestone, but the much more serious charge of deliberate deception continued to appear. In 1961, the journal of the British National Party, *Combat*, published an article titled “Jewish Deceit at Dachau”:

“When Dachau fell into Western hands in 1945, it had to look the part, so...it was transformed into a showplace of horrors. ... The camp had to have a gas chamber, so, since one did not exist, it was decided to pretend that the shower bath had been one. Previously it had flagstones to a height of about four feet [on the walls]. Similar flagstones were taken [from the adjacent room] and put above those in the shower bath, and a new lower ceiling was created at the top of this second row of flagstones, with iron funnels in it (the [fake] inlets for the gas).” (Combat, Jan/Feb 1961, issue #10, p. 4).

Indeed, the gas chamber ceiling today is 2.15 meters high, but the adjacent room height is 2.9 meters—a full 75 cm (30 inch) differential.

Whoever lowered the ceiling and installed the ‘fake showerheads’ did a remarkably crude job. Today it appears as a poured concrete ceiling, smooth and white, into which someone roughly chiseled several

funnel-shaped holes. Of the 15 such holes, 13 have an open metal funnel, one is complete with perforated head, and the last is fully exposed—see Photos 4, 5, 6.

In most cases one can see, faintly, evidence of rework to the ceiling after the ‘shower heads’ were installed—see Photo 7.

By the 1960s, talk of mass killings in a “Dachau gas chamber” subsided significantly. Raul Hilberg’s magnum opus, *Destruction of the European Jews*, contains virtually no mention of such a gas chamber—either in his first (1961) edition or in his massive, 3-volume 2003 edition. Paul Berben’s *Dachau 1933-1945: The Official History* states flatly that “the Dachau gas-chamber was never operated” (1975: 8).^[10] Laqueur (2001: 240) briefly discusses the Blaha testimony and his claim that “several executions were carried out in the Dachau gas chamber.” Laqueur concludes that, because of the “mantle of secrecy” that surrounded Barrack X (the crematorium) and the fact that we have “only one unequivocal testimony”—that of Blaha—that therefore “it is difficult to corroborate Blaha’s statements and say with certainty whether the Dachau gas chamber was ever used for its designed purpose.”

The most definitive recent study is Harold Marcuse’s *Legacies of Dachau* (2001). This 590-page book contains numerous details on the camp construction and history, and yet has scarcely a mention of the infamous gas chamber. He claims, without evidence, that “only trial gassings” were conducted at the camp.^[11] He cites a 1960 exhibit in the crematorium that included a sign with a striking admission: “This room would have been used as an undressing and waiting room if the gas chamber had worked” (p. 254). Marcuse dismisses this claim, stating, again without evidence, that it was in fact used “on at least two groups of prisoners.” He quickly adds that “it was indeed never used for systematic gassings...”

Other recent works seem to completely overlook Dachau, as if it played no role whatsoever in the Holocaust. Longerich’s authoritative *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (2010), for example, has only passing mention of the camp on three or four scattered pages (out of 645 total), and no reference to a gas chamber there at all.

Even as late as 2003, there was an official sign there stating: “GAS CHAMBER: disguised as a ‘shower room’—never used as a gas chamber.” Today there is one wall sign that says, “This was the center of potential (!) mass murder.” Another sign states that the chamber “was not used for mass murder. Survivors have testified that the SS did, however, murder individual prisoners and small groups here using poison gas.”^[12] Evidently the story of a ‘homicidal gas chamber’ must be maintained at all costs.

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There are other reasons to be suspicious, and other indications that something is not quite right with the official history. Let’s return to the room itself. Photo 8 shows the interior entrance door and the infamous “*Brausebad*” (‘shower’) sign, looking on through to the exterior exit door.

Both entrance and exit have similar, heavy, vault-like metal doors. The entrance door is wedged in place against the floor and cannot move, but the exit door swings freely. The problem is that it *does not close*. The following two photos (9 and 10) show that this door hits on the locking pin; it cannot close and cannot seal ‘gas tight’. In fact the door is roughly half an inch too wide for the pin. This is no minor adjustment. The doorway was significantly altered since its original construction. But we do not know when, or for what purpose. It may have been as part of covert American alterations immediately after the war, or it could have simply reflected the general conversion of the camp to a ‘memorial’ and tourist

destination in the early 1960s—it clearly would not do to have tourists locking each other in the room. (But of course, with one door wedged open, this could not happen...another strange fact.)

During my visit I came prepared to do a unique bit of analysis: I brought along a hand-held wall metal detector.^[13] I cannot claim any astounding new discoveries, but I did a fairly careful scan of all four interior walls and the ceiling. The walls had virtually no metal at all, at least to the scanning depth of three inches. The ceiling, by contrast, showed extensive metal content, almost throughout the entire extent. There was no evident pattern, just a more or less continuous positive reading. This would suggest some kind of heavy wire mesh, perhaps associated with the poured concrete.^[14] It was not possible to detect the presence or absence of individual pipes in the ceiling.

Another feature of interest is the pair of “Zyklon gassing ports.” In the (one) exterior wall we find two large (70 x 40 cm) openings, with a heavy metal grating on the interior—see Photos 11 and 12. Allegedly, the Zyklon pellets were dumped into a chute on the exterior of the building (Photo 13) and then either were trapped by the grill, or spilled through onto the floor. The grill was there to prevent the victims from interfering with this process.

There are several problems with this set-up. First, the chutes are welded open, so that no one can verify the closure, air-tight seal, etc. Second, the process is very crude—hardly better than just tossing an open Zyklon can into the room as the door is being slammed shut. Third, the first few dead bodies could have easily blocked the grates, putting a quick end to the gassing process. Then there is the problem of cleanup: How were the operators supposed to collect up those deadly Zyklon pellets, which would continue to emit gas for two hours or more, long after the victims were dead? To this we have no answer.

Furthermore, it is a very inefficient scheme at best; the poison gas would only slowly and unevenly diffuse into the room. Better to employ some kind of heated, forced-air system that would quickly circulate the deadly gas. And in fact, the Germans had precisely such a system—and only three rooms away. Room #1 (see Photo 2) contains four actual Zyklon disinfesting chambers, with sophisticated dispensing systems. Photo 14 shows the exterior of these chambers, and Photo 15 the machine for opening and retaining the pellets, and forcing hot air through them. These rooms were very effective at delousing linens, clothing, and personal items, and thus preventing the spread of the deadly typhus disease.^[15] Evidently the Germans wanted to *spare* lives in the camp, not end them.

And one further oddity: The Zyklon chutes show clear signs of being installed *after* the original building construction. In close-up views of the chutes, we can see that the concrete mortar is clearly different than that used for the remainder of the wall—finer quality, more viscous, and of different composition. See Photos 16 (left chute), 17 (right chute), and the detail in Photo 18.

There would not be such a discrepancy in the construction material if the gas chamber and chutes were installed at the time of construction, as the experts insist to this day. Evidently someone broke into the completed brick wall at a later date to install the chutes—perhaps at the direction of the occupying Americans.

While they were at it, someone, at some later date, significantly altered the crematorium chimney. Compare the following Photo 19, from the summer of 1944, with Photo 1, which I explicitly took from the same perspective.

The new chimney is significantly shorter, and thus, at the very least, someone removed the top 10 or 20 feet. They also added some sort of white banding strips at two points. There is no obvious explanation for this reconstruction. Well-built brick chimneys survive for literally hundreds of years. More riddles.

Finally there is a huge question mark around the piping and ductwork that runs above and behind the room. Various drawings and studies over the years indicate numerous changes, alterations, additions, and reconstructions—to the point where the present system is nonsensical. A properly-designed chamber would be clear and simple: a single air duct connected at opposite ends of the room (to recirculate the poison gas), an in-line air heater (to improve gasification), a remote (attic or backroom) Zyklon introduction device, and a simple pair of inlet/outlet chimneys for cleansing the chamber of the deadly gas. Instead we find, by all indications, an absurd, jury-rigged system of pipes, valves, and condensers, one that bears all the marks of a series of postwar constructions. In all likelihood the room was designed and built as an actual shower, which was then reconstructed, with the lower ceiling, to meet American expectations of what a 'gas chamber' should look like.

One can imagine what visitors learn of all this when they see the camp today. Entrance is free and there are no official guides, so various groups pass through with various self-appointed 'expert' guides. However, when it comes to the crematorium (Barrack X), there seems to be a set routine. The group gathers outside the building as the guide briefly explains the 'assembly-line process' of undressing, gassing, cremating, etc. He then sends them in at one end, and they pass through the several rooms of the building (see again the floor plan in Photo 2), emerging from the furnace room, where the guide is dutifully waiting. No guide accompanies the groups inside—all the better to avoid any pointed and difficult questions that may arise. Perhaps it was a coincidence, but in the several hours that I was in the chamber and building, not one guide entered the gas chamber.

Traditional historians would undoubtedly like to see the infamous Dachau gas chamber simply fade away. Playing no role in the Holocaust, it serves no real purpose. The many problems and inconsistencies make it more of an embarrassment than asset to the orthodox view. And in truth it is more than an embarrassment; such deception threatens to undermine major aspects of the entire Holocaust story. A purpose-built gas chamber, right on German soil, sitting for two years...but 'never used'? So maybe all those other gas chambers in Poland were likewise 'never used'? All those indications of reconstruction, alteration, fraud...perhaps recurring in places like Auschwitz and Majdanek? [\[16\]](#) A complicit mass media, directed by the Sulzbergers, Pulitzers, Goldwyns, Cohns, and Selznicks of the world, happy to play along, unwilling to ask tough questions or conduct an impartial investigation...could that happen today? And a situation rife with American lies to justify Allied war crimes and defend a tragic story of Jewish suffering...what shall we make of that? Best not to ask too many questions.

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Notes:

- [1] <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005214> accessed 26 Oct 2011.
- [2] Laqueur (2001: 240) claims that "The Germans built a gas chamber in the second crematorium building of Dachau...in March 1942."
- [3] The camp was occupied by the Americans on 29 April 1945.
- [4] IMT document L-159, vol. 37, p. 621.
- [5] The following sources are detailed by Thomas Kues (2010).
- [6] *Der Weg*, vol 8, no 5-6.
- [7] *Der Weg*, vol 8, no 8. Under byline "Warwick Hester."
- [8] *Deutschen Wochenzeitung*, 18 June 1960, as reported by Kues (2010).
- [9] Letter to *Die Zeit*, 19 August 1960.
- [10] The point is reiterated later in the book: "As is well-known, the crematorium was enlarged by a gas-chamber, however this was never put into operation." (p. 176)
- [11] Page 46. He adds that "death by other causes supplied enough raw human material for the ovens"—as if the Germans needed dead bodies for fuel!
- [12] To gas individual persons, in a room of 425 square feet, is ludicrous.

- [13] Zircon "Videoscanner" 5.5.
- [14] The block wall construction would not require supporting wire mesh, and thus the negative reading is not surprising.
- [15] Traditionalist writer Harry Mazal counters that delousing requires high air concentrations of Zyklon gas, whereas the gassing of people requires a much lower concentration to be fatal. This, he claims, accounts for the dispensing machines for delousing but not for murder. However, the Germans would clearly have wanted to kill everyone in a crowded room, in short order, and this would necessitate a high-concentration, forced-air system, just like in the delousing chambers. Mazal's claim that the chutes made it "simpler and less expensive" to kill people, rather than using the "costly" dispensing machines, is ridiculous. ("The Dachau gas chambers," www.holocaust-history.org)
- [16] For more on the story of those camps and their gas chambers, see my book *Debating the Holocaust* (2009).

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